



STATE SENATOR
BRUCE PATTERSON
IN THE LOOP ★

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Senate approves tax cuts to stimulate state economy

The Senate recently passed a package of legislation aimed at jumpstarting the economy by enticing small business to stay in the state. The Senate plan will cut taxes in half for more than 30,000 Michigan job providers by reducing the alternative Single Business Tax rate from 2 percent to 1 percent. The bill will provide \$30 million in tax relief to small businesses in calendar year 2006.

SB 956 will place surplus budget funds into the state's savings account. Based on projections, a budget surplus of \$116.3 million is available for this account.

Additionally, a package of House bills also establishes protections against onerous regulations by the Michigan Department of Treasury. Provisions in the legislation include:

- Protection from retroactive regulations issued by the Michigan Department of Treasury;
- A requirement that auditors inform taxpayers of refund opportunities that are discovered during an audit;
- Allowance for taxpayers to claim a credit amount as an offset against a debit amount identified during an audit; and
- Taxpayers' right to an informal conference if the Michigan Department of Treasury issues a credit audit, a refund denial or a denial of a consolidation request.

Senators start hearings on graduation requirements

Members of the Senate Education Committee have begun hearing thoughts and concerns about a proposal to enact statewide high school graduation requirements. Committee members plan to have hearings throughout the state.

The proposal has been well-received, but senators want to hear from parents, teachers, school leaders, job providers and others. The proposal from the state Board of Education would require that student take a certain number of years of English, math, science and other subjects before being allowed to graduate. Michigan, which now requires just a half year of civics class to graduate, is among just a few states that have no or almost no graduation requirements.

On January 12, Sen. Patterson hosted a Town Hall on Education at Schoolcraft College, featuring State Schools' Superintendent, Mike Flanagan. He explained the new proposed requirements. If adopted by about March 1, they will apply to the graduating class of 2010.

Up to three more such meetings in the Seventh District are in planning stages now. One may be of the Senate's Education Committee, which could become a joint Senate-House Committee meeting.

** If you would like to receive direct notice of such district meetings, please send your request for this to Mr. Chris Gillett at cgillett@senate.mi.gov or (517) 373-0753.

Proposed law would protect state parks

Legislation designed to protect Michigan's state parks was introduced in the Senate recently. Senate Bill 971 would require that the State Park Advisory Committee study any Michigan Department of Natural Resources proposal to sell a state park. The plan was prompted by recent statements made about the value of selling state parks. Currently under Michigan law the DNR is allowed to declare any land it owns as 'surplus land' and put it up for sale.

Under the proposal bills, only a sale approved by three-fourths of the committee could be presented to the Legislature. If signed into law, the bill would prevent the DNR from unilaterally selling a state park — making it a special act requiring approval from the Legislature. There is no provision in state law requiring legislative review of any proposal to sell a state park.

The legislation would require a review as well as involving the newly created state parks advisory committee in evaluating the merits of any such proposal. SB 972, would prevent the DNR from designating land located within a state park as 'surplus land.'

Leaders find extra state dollars to save

Legislation introduced to help make sure Michigan is prepared for economic uncertainty was approved by the Senate recently. Based on projections from the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference on Jan. 12, a budget surplus of \$116.3 million is available for the state's savings account from the book closing for Fiscal Year 2004-2005. If signed into law, Senate Bill 956 would place the surplus into the Budget Stabilization Fund. An amendment added to SB 956 would set aside \$21.5 million in Low Income Energy Assistance Funds for heating assistance for low-income utility customers.

According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, an objective nonpartisan organization, the money will be used to assist low income Michigan residents pay their utility bills and for weatherization projects designed to reduce homeowner utility costs long-term. SB 956 now goes before the House of Representatives for consideration.

Inquiring Minds Might Want to Know

Does someone want to know whom you're calling on your cell phone? Do you really trust your spouse's claims about frequent calls on the cell phone? How about your boss? Want to find out for sure? Could this record be useful in court? -- against you?

Several companies claim to offer such services, though none seems affiliated with any major cellular telephone or VOIP service (voice over Internet protocol) providers.

Senator Patterson, R-Canton, Chairman of the Technology & Energy Committee, held a hearing on this issue on January 18. "This appears to be a growing problem around the country," Patterson said.



Mr. Steve Skinner confers with Sen. Patterson about cell phone privacy.

Mr. Steve Skinner, of Cingular, a cell phone service provider, said there are no current laws against posing as a cell phone customer and obtaining private records under false pretenses, using stolen information.

Reports suggest that in some cases, telephone company insiders secretly sell customers' phone-call lists to online brokers, despite strict telephone company rules against such deals. Companies offering such services found on the Internet sell this information for about \$90.

"The public is concerned about identity theft. The Michigan Legislature has already acted to provide such protections to consumers. This seems like the next logical step. People value their privacy," said Patterson. As Chairman of the Committee, Patterson has guided legislation to combat spyware and SPAM through the committee.

Password = Smart. It is important to take steps to protect the security of your information. One way to protect your account is to use passwords diligently. One cell service provider gives these ideas:

PASSWORD PROTECTION TIPS FOR YOU [Adapted from T-Mobile]

- .Create separate passwords for voicemail, T-Mobile online access, and for use when calling Customer Care.
- .Set complex passwords, using both numbers and letters where appropriate.
- .Avoid common passwords, such as birth dates, family or pet names, and street addresses.
- .Change your passwords at least every 60 days.
- .Memorize your passwords.
- .Don't share your passwords, even with friends and family.

Investigate MDOT's \$17 million for International Crossing studies?

Four GOP lawmakers have written MDOT Director, Gloria Jeff, asking for a meeting to update them on the status of the International Border Crossing study. Unless MDOT is forthcoming, the lawmakers promise to schedule hearings to investigate. "We feel that an accounting and explanation of the process and expense of these funds is due," says the letter.

Rep. Phil LaJoy, R-Canton, Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, has received calls to say a decision is already reached. "What have they done, and where are they now? That's what we want to know," said LaJoy.

In 2004, officials working on the proposals pushed the completion back to 2013, two years later than the projections made in 2003. After removal of the Downriver proposals in October, 2005, MDOT said fewer than a dozen potential sites remained, but a final decision was to be announced sometime in 2007.

Last Summer, challenging the reasonableness of a Downriver site, Sen. Patterson raised the issue of waste, repeatedly pointing to the federal requirements of feasibility and practicality in consideration of sites. [Based on an AP story, 1/19/06 by Amy F. Bailey]

Office Hours schedule for January and February, 2006

On **Tuesdays** of each week, except February 6th, Sue Trussell, Sen. Patterson's District Representative, will hold office hours from 11:00am to 1:00pm at the following places:

January 31st Plymouth District Library
(includes Plymouth Twp constituents, and others)
February 6th Belleville Library ** *MONDAY* **
(includes Van Buren Twp constituents)
February 14th Gibraltar City Hall
February 21st Canton Library
February 28th Grosse Ile – Mochavation Café

Contact Information

Thank you for your interest in our current state issues. If you would like to receive future updates via e-mail, please contact my office at < senbpatterson@senate.michigan.gov >. You can also visit me in my Lansing office at 505 Farnum Building, just across S. Capitol Avenue from the state Capitol; or you can send me mail at P. O. Box 30036, Lansing, MI 48909. Telephone (517) 373-7350 or (866) 262-7307; fax (517) 373-9228. I want to hear from you.

See the *Legislative Questionnaire* on the Website, too! Your responses are welcomed!